

“Call me however what thou wilt. I am who I must be. I call myself Zarathustra.” The Glossary Named Hobson–Jobson, 1886

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Abstract

This article relates to an 1886-published glossary titled *Hobson–Jobson, being a glossary of Anglo-Indian colloquial words and phrases and of kindred terms; etymological, historical, geographical, and discursive*, compiled by Henry Yule and Arthur Burnell, two Britons working in India. This is an intellectually intrepid effort of lexicalizing Indian words used by the British in India in the mid and later decades of the 19th century. On closer reading, this volume impresses more as a lexicon that extensively catalogues words assimilated into spoken and written English by the British residents in 19th century India, from various Indian languages. Joseph Rudyard Kipling, while serving as the sub-editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* (C.M.G.) in Lahore, commented on this glossary in C.M.G.–1886. Kipling’s commentary is exhaustive. It is delightful and hilarious. Hence, parts of that are reproduced in the present article. The present article aims to highlight that a comprehensive knowledge of historical lexicons, dictionaries, and glossaries of the English language is essential for present-day English teachers in India, mainly because such volumes provide conceptual clarity on the evolution of the English language, in addition to value-added meanings and origins of words. I am convinced that such an understanding will go a long way toward improving the classroom teaching of English in India, particularly in teaching English as a second language.

Keywords: Hobson–Jobson; Anglo-Indian English; Lexical borrowing; Colloquialism and slang; Historical lexicography; Indian loanwords in English

INTRODUCTION

In the title of this article, I have borrowed words from *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (*Thus spoke Zarathustra: a book for all and none*, 1883–1885) by the 19th century German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche, to refer to a 19th-century book, *Hobson–Jobson, being a glossary of Anglo-Indian colloquial words and phrases and of kindred terms; etymological, historical, geographical, and discursive*. For convenience, this book will hereafter be referred to in this article as *Hobson–Jobson*, a strange and curious name! To Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* personified liberation and forthrightness. To Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* was a brash refuter of social categories radiating self-determination and authenticity; represented a distinct style of thinking, trouncing conventions and traditions; sought a new wave of candour. The subject of the present article, *Hobson–Jobson*, is a catalogue of widely used colloquial words in India in the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries that portrays

an *avant-garde* thinking as appropriate in modern social linguistics (Millar 2012). *Hobson–Jobson* documents those Indian words first assimilated into spoken English by the British living in India and later in written English using English spellings. *Hobson–Jobson* impresses more as a lexicon that lists Indian words used by the British in India in the referred time. This effort of Yule and Burnell strikes as a brave effort when considered against the language-use puritanism of the British. This becomes all the more significant when the best English was the *Queen’s English*, particularly in the later decades of the 19th century (Wales 1994). *Hobson–Jobson* illustrates the defiance of puritanism and fits snugly into the *Zarathustra* metaphor.

Colloquialism is the informal, more usually spoken than written, communication between equals (Trask 1999). Colloquialism implies words and phrases understood by people in particular geographical regions, expressions appreciated by

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people speaking specific-language dialects, commonly used words that lack focal meaning, and a rapidly changing vocabulary (Trudgill 1999). One unique example of regional colloquialism is the widely used phrase ‘gun time’ in the present-day Tamil Nadu (earlier, the Presidency of Madras). This phrase means either a punctual person or the punctual start of an event. The ‘gun time’ phrase has been in vogue in Tamil Nadu from the early decades of the 19th century, which arose from the firing of empty shots from a cannon in Fort St. George, sharp at 12 noon and 8.00 p.m. every day, when time devices were unknown (Raman and Balakrishnan 2020). Other examples of regional colloquialism used India-wide are ‘forenoon’, ‘prepone’, and ‘thrice’: forenoon and prepone used as opposed to ‘afternoon’ and ‘postpone’, respectively; ‘thrice’ used as a natural extension of frequency-adverbs ‘once’ and ‘twice’. Such a distinct phraseology exclusive to present-day India is strange because standard English dictionaries list ‘forenoon’, ‘prepone’, and ‘thrice’ as archaic and suggest the use of ‘morning’, ‘to advance’, and ‘three times’ instead.

George Bernard Shaw, English dramatist and satirist, explored the power of language in high and low British society of the early 20th-century in *Pygmalion*, wherein Henry Higgins, a professional linguist and a high-society gentleman, trains Eliza Doolittle, a London-slum dweller, to use King’s English in everyday conversations instead of the cockney to which she was used. Today, colloquial English, as a language genre, is receiving attention from professional linguists for diverse reasons. They argue that colloquialism (not only in English, but also in other languages, see Schiffman 1999, for example) enhances authenticity and relatability (Collins and Yao 2018), reveals personal identity and culture (Norton 1997), and enriches literature (White 2025). Remembering the extensive use of colloquial English by Charles Dickens (19th century) and Stephen King (b. 1947) in creative works is not out of place at this point. In addition, while rationalising the evolution of colloquialism, both as a progressing and progressive-language genre, communication sociologists consider colloquial-

ism a powerful and an effective-language tool in casual communications, since it builds positive connectivity between people. Colloquialisms and slang¹ in different languages, including English, imply the way people communicate in real society. In fact, colloquial communications strongly influence the quality of interactions between people, reflecting sensitivities and experiences (Palmer et al. 2016). Because social reality is catalysed and energised by human communication and interactions, individuals recognise colloquial communications as real mainly because of repeated use over time². What is critical here is to recognise that ‘new’ meanings for extant words evolve due to changing styles and dimensions of social interactions and are influenced by multimedia (Hulme and Rodd 2021). For illustrative examples, see the website of the Oxford University Press³. An inevitable social advancement is that meanings for evolved words get altered as we humans experience reflective processes within ourselves and others (van Dijk 1999). Different meanings that words can bear on different people are based on perceptions that gradually get internalized by the ‘circuit of culture’ that includes representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (du Gay et al. 1997).

The line of distinction between colloquialism and slang is thin (Partridge 1985). ‘Slang’ is ‘an informal nonstandard vocabulary composed typically of coinages, arbitrarily changed words, and extravagant, forced, or facetious figures of speech’⁴, whereas ‘colloquial’ is more specific to a language ‘that is most suited to informal conversation, and it ultimately garners an additional, disparaging implication of a style that seems highly informal for either a specific or a specific situation’⁵. Yet many linguists (e.g., Green 2016) consider slang a subset of colloquialism.

Against such a context of colloquialism and slang, the present article refers to a late-19th century glossary, compiled by Henry Yule and Arthur Burnell, published in 1886 (Fig. 1), that stands apart by its intents and contents from other similar works of 19th-century English. I felt compelled to share

¹ Possibly of Norwegian roots, a corruption of *slengja kjeften* — ‘sling the jaw’, ‘abuse of words’ (Mattiello 2008).

² Similar to how the ‘illusory truth effect’ works in human societies (Hasher et al. 1977).

³ <https://learningenglishwithoxford.com/2024/02/29/15-modern-english-words-with-different-meanings-in-the-past/>, accessed on 9 December 2025

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/slang>, accessed on 22 November 2025

⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colloquial>, accessed on 22 November 2025

details of the *Hobson–Jobson* in this forum because when I spoke about this glossary to a few professional English teachers in India, many of them responded in surprise. As said before, the *Hobson–Jobson*, to me, is a valiant attempt that contextualizes and validates colloquialism in the English language by formally cataloguing the then prevalent loan and assimilated words from Indian languages in the 19th century. Standard British dictionaries of English (e.g., Oxford English Dictionary) list words that have been added by migrant communities into Britain in the last few decades, and linguists consider such a development as positive, since they have added value to the English language and its consequent enrichment of vocabulary. Danica Salazar (lexicographer, Oxford Language Unit and World English Editor, Oxford University Press) says in *The Guardian*, ‘It is only when we share ownership of English, and embrace the language in all its diversity, that it can truly be a gift that everyone can benefit from’¹.

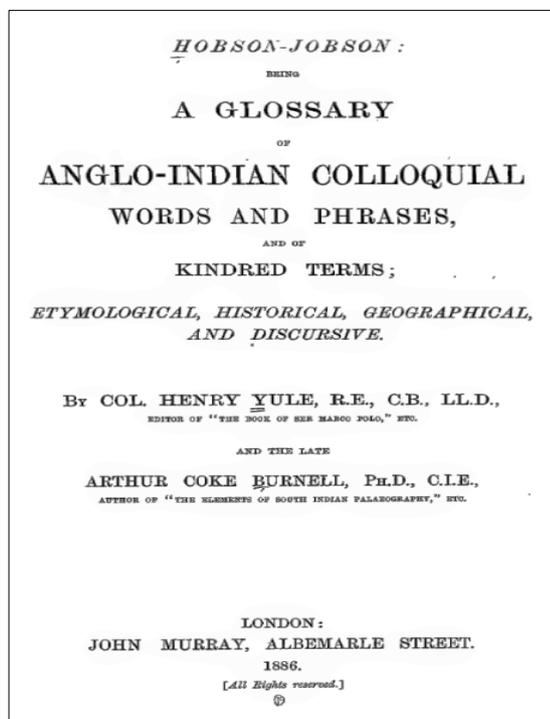


Figure 1. Cover page of *Hobson–Jobson* (1886, 1st edition)

HENRY YULE AND ARTHUR BURNELL

Henry Yule (1820–1889) (Portrait 1, left) was an engineer, a geographer, and an orientalist from Scotland. After training in the Royal School of Military Engineering in Chatham, Kent, he joined the Bengal Military-Engineering Corps in 1840. He worked in the *Khasia-s* (presently, North-eastern India) initially and in Calcutta later (Yule 1903). Arthur Coke Burnell (1840–1882) (Portrait 1, right) was a pre-eminent *Sanskrit* scholar, with a penchant for southern-Indian languages and literature. During formative years, he was influenced by Michael Viggo Fausbøll, a Danish Orientalist and a *Pāli–Prākṛit* and *Sanskrit*-language specialist. In 1860, Burnell worked in Tanjore (*Tanjavur*) in the Presidency of Madras. Further to the *Handbook of South Indian Palæography* (1874), his other literary works include translations of many *Sanskrit* texts and chapters. He wrote commentaries on High Tamil (செந்தமிழ்) and on Tamil poetry².

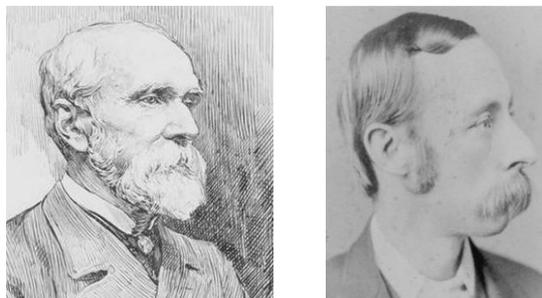


Figure 2. Portraits 1 (Left) Henry Yule³ and Portrait 2 (Right) Arthur Burnell⁴

A second edition of the *Hobson–Jobson* appeared in the early decades of the 20th century through the efforts of William Crooke (1848–1923), a civil servant in the State of Oudh (presently, North-eastern Uttar Pradesh) and an orientalist. In this edition of the *Hobson–Jobson*, Crooke added a handful of new entries and quotations, further correcting some etymological explanations. Indian reprints of Crooke’s edition of the *Hobson–Jobson*, printed by the Oxford University Press India and Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi), are presently available.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2022/dec/12/english-words-world-global-speakers-language>, accessed on 21 December 2025

² https://en.wiki-source.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography_1885–1900/Burnell_Arthur_Coke, accessed on 23 November 2025

³ Source: <https://cherrapunjee.com/lt-henry-yule-bengal-engineers-1844/>

⁴ Source: <https://royalasiaticcollections.org/photo-24-012-arthur-coke-burnell/>

THE TERMS 'ANGLO-INDIAN' AND 'HOBSON-JOBSON'

Currently, the term 'Anglo-Indian' refers to descendants of mixed ancestry in India, British¹ on the one hand and Indian on the other. But until 1911, Anglo-Indian meant only the British living in India². Before 1911, descendants of European-Indian lineage were either 'Eurasians' or 'Indo-Britons' and not 'Anglo-Indians'. When the Constitution of India was promulgated in 1950, Article 366(2) explained an Anglo-Indian as a person of European-Indian descent, a citizen of India, and a habitual resident. This explanation offered a special political status and valid representation to Anglo-Indians (previously European-Indians, Eurasians, Indo-Britons) as citizens of India, which was later modified with the 104th amendment, 2019. Presently, the term 'Anglo-Indian' refers to people of mixed, *i.e.*, European-Indian descent with a wider scope than what was implied in 1950. The first edition of the *Hobson-Jobson* appeared in 1886, with the preparatory work by Yule and Burnell starting in 1872. The 1872-1886 timespan adequately clarifies that 'Anglo-Indian' used by Yule and Burnell in the first edition of *Hobson-Jobson* meant the British residents in India. Consequently, we understand that the *Hobson-Jobson* records colloquial English words and other assimilated foreign-language words used commonly by the British residing in India.

In the introduction of the *Hobson-Jobson*, Yule explains that it is a 'typical' and 'delightful' example of that class of Anglo-Indian *argot* that was made of highly assimilated Oriental³ words to English vernacular (Yule and Burnell 1886). *Hobson-Jobson* is a lengthy and complex text. It is a valuable historical record of details, especially

that of the vocabulary used in 19th-century India (Lambert 2013). Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri, a renowned author in English and of Indian roots, remarks in 'Historical Perspective' in the *Linguasia* edition of the *Hobson-Jobson* (1994):

'British working bees of the Empire, who worked all over the country, often in small towns where one was the single White man ... [who were] forced to create shortcuts by employing Indian words, mostly of north-Indian origin, but anglicised phonetically.'

The *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1975) speaks of the *Hobson-Jobson*:

'the vocabulary, consisting of Anglicised Hindi or other Indian words, developed by British subjects in civil and military service in India: also called Hobson-Jobson'.

Yule and Burnell (p. 319) explain the unusual phrase *Hobson-Jobson* as that derived from the Arabic-wail cry *Yā Hasan, yā Hosain* of the *Shia* Muslims in British India during the *Muharram* mourning of the martyrdom of Hasan and Hosain, grandsons of Prophet Mohammed. Yule and Burnell (1886) clarify that the call *Yā Hasan, yā Hosain*, misheard as *Hosseen-Gosseen* by British soldiers in India, over time gradually turned slangy as *Hossy-Gossy* and *Hossein-Jossen*, ultimately settling as *Hobson-Jobson*⁴. Strangely, many of the late 19th-century English authors saw both this book and the title as coarse and uncouth (Nagle 2010). Technically, *Hobson-Jobson* falls into the linguistic phenomenon described as 'ablaut reduplication'⁵ (Minkova 2002, Wivell et al. 2024).

A casual, preliminary communication between Yule, living in Palermo (Italy) post-retirement, and Burnell in Madras-Government Service in Tanjore in the early 1870s triggered an exercise, which materialized as the *Hobson-Jobson* in the

1 The term 'British' used currently includes other Europeans, *viz.*, French, Dutch, and Portuguese.

2 Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anglo-Indian>, accessed 22 November 2025

3 The Merriam-Webster's (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oriental>, accessed 9 December 2025) clarifies 'oriental' or 'Oriental' as used here as an unpleasant usage. Use of either 'Asian' or 'East Asian' is suggested as acceptable. The Merriam-Webster's explains the offensiveness of this term is mainly because of 'colonization' of Asian cultures and civilizations by Europeans between the 17th and 20th centuries.

4 For further linguistic analysis of *Hobson-Jobson*, see James Lambert (2013).

5 Ablaut reduplication is a linguistic phenomenon, wherein a repeated word with an altered vowel follows (e.g., Humpty-Dumpty, hokey-pokey, mumbo-jumbo, tick-tock, flip-flop, riff-raff). Ablaut reduplication, as a phenomenon, refers to certain first words that sound naturally, whereas their duplications sound oddly. Otto Harry Jespersen (Professor of English Language, Universitet København, Denmark) in *A modern English grammar on historical principles* (Morphology, Part 6, 1932) (Jespersen et al. 1954) explains ablaut reduplication in English language. The phenomenon of ablaut reduplication was first described by Jacob Ludwig Karl Grimm (of Grimm Brothers fame, Hanau, Germany) (1785-1863) as Ablaut Reduplikation (e.g., Mischmasch, Hickhack, Stinkstank) in *Deutsche Grammatik*, 1819.

following decade. Yule and Burnell had met once in the India-Office Library (Whitehall, London) previously; otherwise, their acquaintance was only through correspondence. Most likely, as much as we get to understand from Yule's introductory section (Yule and Burnell 1886), is that Burnell shared some preliminary thoughts on this topic, which grew into *Hobson-Jobson* (p. vii):

'About 1872 ...he (Burnell) mentioned that he was contemplating a vocabulary of Anglo-Indian words, and had made some collections with that view. ... I (Yule) likewise had long been taking note of such words, and that a notion similar to his (Burnell) own had also been at various times floating in my (Yule) mind. And I proposed that we should combine our labours.'

Joseph Rudyard Kipling (J.R.K., 1865–1936, born in Bombay, presently *Mumbai*), while serving as the sub-editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* (C.M.G.), Lahore (presently in Pakistan), in 1882–1887, reviewed *Hobson-Jobson* in *G.M.G.* in the 15 April 1886 issue¹. J.R.K.'s review of the *Hobson-Jobson* is delightful and candid; hilarious, too. Parts of his review are reproduced below to illustrate Kipling's enchanting prose, its colloquiality, and plush *mélange* of Indian-speech forms and formal English, laced by a delicate authenticity and inclusiveness.

Colonel Yule's *Hobson-Jobson* is not a book to be lightly disposed of in one review. The difficulty in glancing over its eight hundred closely packed pages is where to begin; and having once begun, where to leave off. ... The two gentlemen (Yule and Burnell) conceived the notion of compiling an Anglo-Indian glossary; and the result of their labours is a fascinating volume, neither glossary, vocabulary, dictionary or anything else that may be described in one word, but simply, *Hobson-Jobson*: a glorified olla podrida (*a stew of pork and beans*) of fact, fancy, note, sub-note, reference, cross-reference, and quotations innumerable, bearing on all things connected directly or indirectly with the East. Justly does Colonel Yule call it a 'portly, double-columned edifice'. It is a book which, unless we are much mistaken, will take its place among the standard works on the East; and will pass, gathering bulk as

it goes, from decade to decade. Words, says Colonel Yule, are the jetsam which the tides of languages cast up on the beach of human thought, to be gathered together and placed in cabinets by the curious. When the author of *Hobson-Jobson* takes a word up, he deals with it lovingly, showing how it grew or fell away from its original purity by the corruption of time; also in what varying senses it has been used; concluding finally by three or four notes, or sometimes a page of quotations from all manner of strange and recondite sources, which shall throw a full or a side light on that word. Where his trove has no particular history, he tells, like the sages of old, a tale in a pleasantly discursive manner. *Bundobust* (arrangement, system, agreement...), for instance, has no pedigree, but its meaning is varied and its use extensive. Forty-three years ago, an old *khansamah* (steward) informed the author that there must be a *bahut accha bundobust* in *Belait* ('thank you' agreement in England), because the young and raw Sahib on his arrival at Calcutta was wont to say 'Thank you' to his servants when they brought him tea. Three months of the East, continued the *khansamah*, changed civility into abuse. This explanation is supplemented with a couple of lines from the ever-dear *Ali Baba*, and shows in some measure from what mixed sources Colonel Yule builds up his information. Of *bus* (*stop! enough!*), Colonel Yule says justly, 'few Hindustani words stick closer by the returned Anglo-Indian'. Turning to *jinrickshaw*, which Colonel Yule spells *jennyrickshaw*, we find that its exact meaning is 'man-strength cart', and here those who may be ignorant of two most pleasant books are introduced, by the way of quotation, to Miss Bird's 'Japan', and Gill's 'River of Golden Sand'. As a suggestive book, over and above all its other merits, *Hobson-Jobson*, pity it is that the title is so uncouth, stands alone. One of these days, it may set the Government searching for a substitute for opium revenue when that drug ceases to be imported into China. The Chinese set a far higher value on the ginseng root than on opium, paying from six to four hundred

¹ source: https://www.kipling-society.co.uk/journalism/rg_sketches_28.htm, accessed 24 November 2025

dollars an ounce for it, and attributing to it miraculous virtues. An inferior sort of ginseng comes to China from America, but there exists a very closely allied plant in our own Himalayas. Supposing that the genuine root could be grown in India, or the substitute educated up to its relative's powers, the possibility of an extensive and remunerative trade would seem to be assured; for ginseng, apart from the mythical attributes with which it has been invested, has many of the good points of opium without its drawbacks. ... Everyone in the East, the book ranges from Constantinople to Japan, should possess himself of *Hobson-Jobson* and once possessed of it should apply himself diligently thereto. It will coerce him pleasantly to consult other books and to explore fresh avenues of thought, and may end in making him something that at a pinch might pass for an oriental scholar. Further, it will interest him intensely throughout.

HOBSON-JOBSONISM, A NEW ABSTRACT NOUN

In a 2025-blog captioned *The story behind Hobson-Jobson*¹, Ben Zimmer, an American linguist, lexicographer, and language commentator, uses *Hobson-Jobsonism*, a new morpheme of *Hobson-Jobson*. The term *Hobson-Jobsonism* means diverse, current adoptions of other-language words into English that, when spoken, sound similar to assimilated words. Zimmer's *Hobson-Jobsonism*, most likely, will be used widely in day-to-day English in the future, because of its linguistic outlandishness. Similar morphemes, not strictly 'abstract nouns', but 'adjectival nouns', are in ample use currently. One example is *Johnsonese*, first used by Thomas Babington Macaulay², implying ornate texts embellished with superfluous Latinates, following the inimitable

style of the 18th-century English grammarian, lexicographer Samuel Johnson. One other example is *journalese* that arose from the word *journal* (Old French, 1880s, /ʒuʁnal/, *zhoor-naal*) referring to a sensational prose with overused *cliché*-s and jargon generally written by journalists³. Two other similar words that have evolved in the 21st-century are 'computerese' and 'legalese'.

THE HOBSON-JOBSON, A GLOSSARY OF ANGLO-INDIAN COLLOQUIAL WORDS AND PHRASES

Hobson-Jobson, being a glossary of Anglo-Indian colloquial words and phrases and of kindred terms; etymological, historical, geographical, and discursive opens with Introductory Remarks (pages xiii-xxiv), signed by Yule⁴, that includes a few pages of explanatory notes and instructions to readers, referred as *nota bene*⁵, presented in three subsections: (i) supplement, (ii) data of quotations, and (iii) transliterations. Pages from xxix to xlvi include a list of cited books, followed by two pages of corrigendum (pages xlvii and xlviii).

Whereas the other details are nearly similar to any standard lexicon, the explanation provided under 'transliterations' in *Hobson-Jobson* will be of interest to modern readers (Figure 3). A dictionary is a reference book that includes a list of words arranged alphabetically, each word explained with definitions, pronunciation keys, and etymology. Concise editions (e.g., *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*) serve as sources of quick reference, clarifying words and vocabulary of a language, whereas extended editions (e.g., *The Oxford Encyclopaedic English Dictionary*) are broad in scope and clarify definitions, usage, etymologies, pronunciation keys, with illustrated examples, grammatical notes, and variants of discussed words. Modern editions are available in electronic formats.

- 1 Source: <https://www.vocabulary.com/articles/wordroutes/the-story-behind-hobson-jobson/>, accessed 29 Nov. 2025
- 2 British historian and writer Macaulay (1848, p. 408): 'When he (Samuel Johnson) wrote for publication, he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese'. An example of Johnsonese, pompous and grandiloquent explanation for the word 'excise' in his *A Dictionary of the English Language* is: 'A hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged not by the common judges of property, but by wretches hired by those to whom excise is paid'.
- 3 'Journalese' refers to a stereotypical, formulaic overwrought prose, first used in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, London, in 1882.
- 4 Burnell died in 1882. The first edition of the *Hobson-Jobson* appeared in 1886. Therefore, Yule had taken the full responsibility for the preparatory work before launching the book.
- 5 *Nota bene*, preferentially to be abbreviated as 'n.b.', meaning 'note well', 'pay attention' (source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nota%20bene>; *nota bene*, accessed 29 November 2025). In Indian high schools this abbreviation is awkwardly and incorrectly explained as 'note behind'.

(C.) The system of transliteration used is substantially the same as that modification of Sir William Jones's which is used in Shakespear's Hindustani Dictionary. But—

The first of the three Sanskrit sibilants is expressed by (ś). And, as in Wilson's Glossary, no distinction is marked between the Indian aspirated *k, g*, and the Arabic gutturals *kh, gh*. Also, in words transliterated from Arabic, the sixteenth letter of the Arabic alphabet is expressed by (t). This is the same type that is used for the cerebral Indian (ṭ). Though it can hardly give rise to any confusion, it would have been better to mark them by distinct types. The fact is, that it was wished at first to make as few demands as possible for distinct types, and, having begun so, change could not be made.

The fourth letter of the Arabic alphabet is in several cases represented by (th) when Arabic use is in question. In Hindustani it is pronounced as (s).

Also, in some of Mr. Burnell's transliterations from S. Indian languages, he has used (k) for the peculiar Tamil hard (r), elsewhere (r), and (y) for the Tamil and Malayālam (k) when preceded and followed by a vowel.

Figure 3. Snapshot of text from 'transliterations' in Hobson–Jobson, p. xxviii (1886). Arthur Burnell is referred to here. We know that Burnell was an associate of Henry Yule and a co-author of Yule in this work. Burnell was a civil servant in the Presidency of Madras service, which essentially conversed in Tamizh language. Yule speaks of William Jones in the context of the romanization of Indian-language words (Sanskrit included). William Jones was a distinguished philologist and a Judge in the Supreme Court of Calcutta appointed at an early age. For a detailed biography of this Indologist–linguist see John Shore (1807). The Shakespeare (not to be confused with William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon) was John Shakespeare, an Oriental-languages academic at the Royal Military College, Marlow, England, from 1805 to 1809. His Dictionary, Hindustani and English and English and Hindustani, published by Pelham Richardson, London, was re-published in the next five decades.

Cheroot, s. A cigar. But the term has been appropriated specially to cigars truncated at both ends, as the Indian and Manilla cigars always were in former days. This word is Tamil, *shuruttu*, 'a roll (of tobacco).' In the South cheroots are chiefly made at Trichinopoly and in the Godavery Delta, the produce being known respectively as **Trichies** and **Lunkas**.

The earliest occurrence of the word that we know is in Father Beschi's Tamil story of Parmartta Guru (c. 1725). On p. 1 one of the characters is described as carrying a firebrand to light his *puquiyilai shshuruttu*, 'roll (*cheroot*) of tobacco.'

Grose (1750–60), speaking of Bombay, whilst describing the cheroot does not use that word, but another which is, as far as we know, entirely obsolete in British India, viz., **buncus** (q.v.).

1759. In the expenses of the Nabob's entertainment at Calcutta in this year we find:
"60 lbs. of Masulipatam cheroots, Rs. 500."—In *Long*, 194.

1781. "... am tormented every day by a parcel of gentlemen coming to the end of my berth to talk politics and smoke cheroots—advise them rather to think of mending the holes in their old shirts, like me."—*Hon. J. Lindsay* (in *Lives of the Lindsays*), iii. 297.

"Our evening amusements instead of your stupid Harmonics, was playing Cards and Backgammon, chewing Beetle and smoking Cheroots."—*Old Country Captain* in *India Gazette*, Feby. 24th.

1782. "Le tabac y réussit très bien; les chiroutes de Manille sont renommées dans toute l'Inde par leur goût agréable; aussi les Dames dans ce pays fument-elles toute la journée."—*Sonnerat, Voyage*, iii. 43.

1792. "At that time (c. 1757) I have seen the officers mount guard many's the time and oft . . . neither did they at that time carry your fuses, but had a long Pole with an iron head to it. . . With this in one Hand and a Chiroot in the other you saw them saluting away at the Main Guard."—*Madras Courier*, April 3.

1810. "The lowest classes of Europeans, as also of the natives . . . frequently smoke cheroots, exactly corresponding with the Spanish *segar*, though usually made rather more bulky."—*Williamson, V. M.* i. 499.

1811. "Dire que le T'cherout est la cigarra, c'est me dispenser d'en faire la description."—*Solleys*, iii.

1875. "The meal despatched, all who were not on duty lay down . . . almost too tired to smoke their cheroots before falling asleep."—*The Dilemma*, ch. xxxvii.

REMARKS

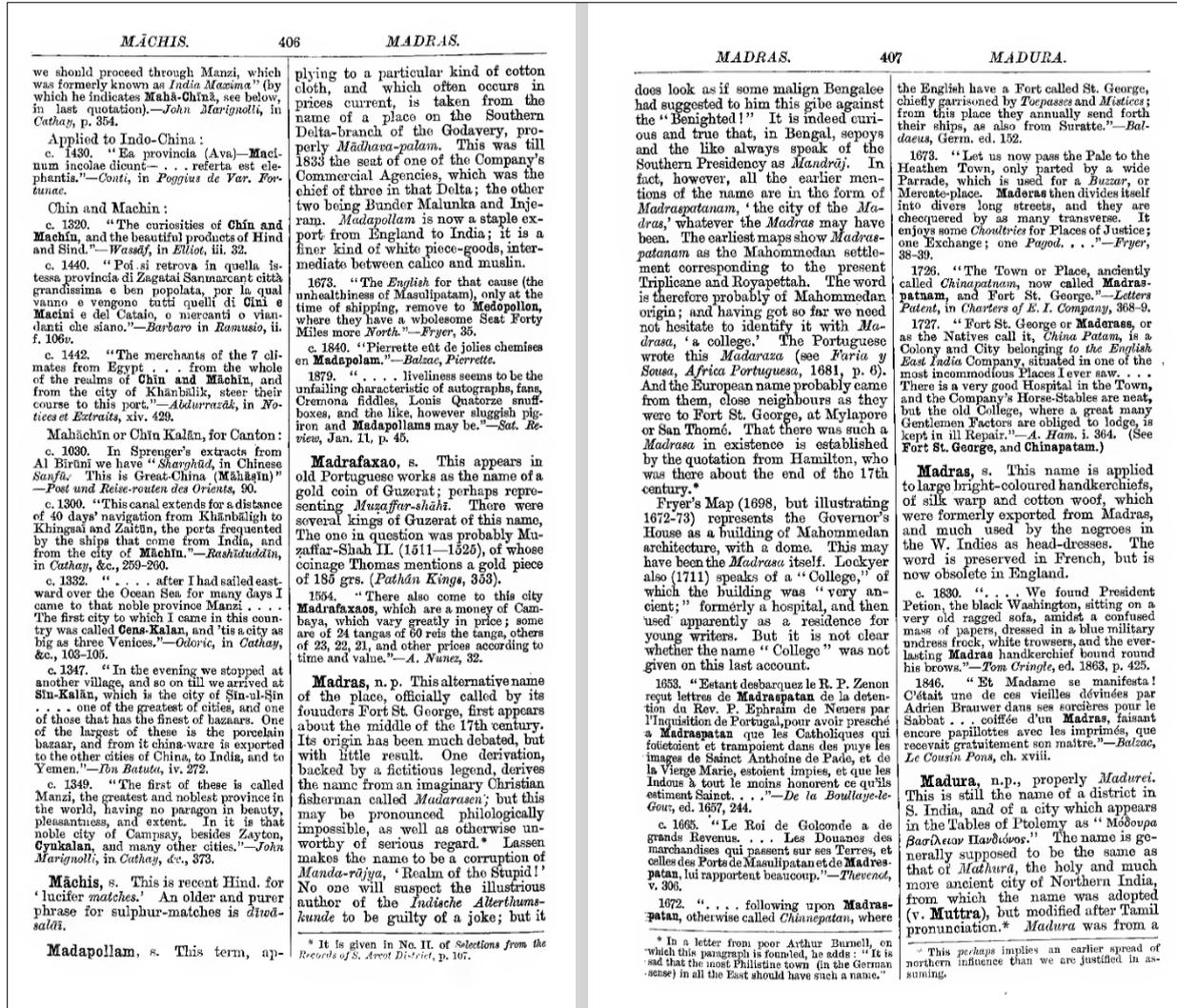
In a broad-brush context of English lexicons and lexicography, the *Hobson–Jobson* is unique, since it lexicalises words from languages spoken in India that were assimilated into spoken and written English by the British residents in India in the 19th century. This book also lists words from Persian and Arabic, two relatively less-spoken languages in India that had entered the subcontinent because of the Mughals (16th to 19th centuries). Since the comments of J.R.K. in 1886, partly reproduced in the present text, comprehensively capture the gist of *Hobson–Jobson*, I analyze only two examples here.

Similar to any standard lexical work, *Hobson–Jobson* includes scores of words arranged alphabetically using English spellings, set in two columns on each page. For example, page 144. (Figure 4) refers to *cheroot*, a tobacco product, similar to 'cigar', well known in Spain and Portugal from the 16th century. In a majority of listed nouns, the letter 's' is shown immediately after, characterizing the number status ('s' for singular) of the noun. This is followed by a brief explanation of the etymology of the word and also as spoken in the native, original language. The noun *cheroot* evolved from *ṣurūttū* (சுருட்டு), Tamil, spelt *shuruttu* by Yule and Burnell 1886), a commercial product of dry-tobacco leaf rolls ready for smoking, produced in the Tamil-speaking *Tiruchirapalli* (then Trichi-

Figure 4. Cheroot (p. 144, snapshot)

napoly, shortened as Trichy) and *Dindigul*, and the Telugu-speaking *Guntur* in the 18th century. This section of the text also mentions *cheroot's* alternate names, viz., *tritchies* (a corruption of *Tiruchira-palli*, a.k.a. *Trichy*, the land of cultivation) and *lunkas* (read as *lanka-s* implying the *cheroots* produced in the Jaffna peninsula of then British Ceylon [presently, Sri Lanka])¹. The *Hobson-Jobson* includes pertinent annotations of *cheroot* from previously published documents, shedding greater clarity on diverse usages and the evolution of meanings. Yule and Burnell (1886) cite, for

example, John Henry Grose's *A voyage to the East Indies: containing authentic accounts of the Mogul government in general, the viceroypalties of the Decan and Bengal, with their several subordinate dependencies ... with general reflections on the trade of India* (1772), Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine, fait par ordre du Roi, depuis 1774 jusqu'en 1781* (1782), and Alexander Lindsay's *Lives of the Lindsays* (1840), exemplifying how widely this product was known and used in India at that point of time.



A perspective of the included details can be obtained from the two snapshotted pages 406–407 (Figure 5). It speaks of 'Madras', presently the

metropolis of Chennai. Here, readers can gain an understanding of the nomenclatural evolution of the town of Madras, later a city, that includes a

1. Winston Churchill, later the Prime Minister of Britain, was a committed smoker of the tritchies, when he remained in Bangalore attached to the 4th Queen's Own Hussars Regiment (1896–1899). Sriramakumar Prakya (Bangaluru) commented that on the tiny islands of the Godavari, referred as lankas, and farmers grow the 'lanka tobacco' for making cigars (personal communication from Sriramakumar Prakya, email, 21 December 2025).

reference to Fryer's¹ classic map of Madras, 1670s. Additionally, Yule and Burnell explain the Madras fabric, widely used to wrap the head in Mauritius, South Africa, and the islands of the Caribbean (French-speaking Antilles) in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Madras head-wrap was exported from the coastal village *Pûlicat* (*Pazhavérkādû*, c. 50 km north of Madras, i.e., Chennai)² (Zamor 2014).

CONCLUSION

Details of past glossaries of English slang and colloquialisms (e.g., *Passing English of the Victorian era* by Ware 1909; *The American slang dictionary* by Maitland 1891) can be obtained from historical sections of present-day dictionaries and online resources.

Lexical borrowing, the process by which a language accepts words and phrases from another language and eventually enriches its vocabulary, occurs through cultural and trade interactions, ultimately resulting in either loanwords or colloquialisms. The cultural and trade interactions are key drivers of linguistic change and social evolution (Zenner et al. 2019). Colloquialisms and their subset, slang, are informal features of a language that are more usually used in casual, everyday speech than in formal contexts. Nevertheless, we presently know that the words and expressions considered colloquial and slang at some point in historical time eventually lost their edges and were accepted in formal conversations and written texts. Words such as 'nice', 'grit', 'fake', 'okay'³ considered slang in either the 18th century or earlier is presently acceptable in standard oral and written English communication. Colloquial and slang words evolve via the same mechanisms as standard, formal words develop in a language, following the same mechanisms of

metaphorization, clipping, and borrowing from other languages that facilitate their evolution, driven by social influence (Eble 1996, Matiello 2008).

Both colloquialism and slang allude to casual use of words and idiomatic expressions that are usually more figurative, light, sometimes indirect, graphic, and transient than formal language. 'To catch red-handed', 'green with envy' are examples that illustrate the power of such word formations. In the 18th century English-speaking world, colloquial and slang referred to the language used by less-educated people and those of less social repute. However, by the end of the 19th century, colloquialism and slang came to refer to words and expressions that were not considered dignified speech.

Colloquialisms and slang belong to a linguistic phenomenon that involves constant modification; sometimes rigorously influenced by the assimilation of foreign-language words. Colloquialisms and slang heighten a social and/or contextual meaning, acceptable to a group of like-minded people. When slang is regional, it becomes a colloquialism. In Indian English, some of the English words and idioms are unique, verging on colloquialism. Some examples would be 'timepass' meaning wasting time, and phrases such as 'kindly revert' meaning please respond, and 'revert' is still tautological.

Ethnicity is an organic construct; it is neither involuntary nor automatic. When people recognize themselves as of a specific ethnicity, they develop special linguistic traits and practice them. Words and idioms assimilated in a language different from the parent source most usually show similarities at linguistic levels, such as the pronunciation, and differences at other levels, such as grammar and

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- 1 John Fryer was a medical doctor and a ship surgeon working colloquialisms for the English East-India Company. Between 1673 and 1682 he travelled to India touching Machilipatam (Masulipatnam), Madras (Chennai), and Bombay (Mumbai). His book published posthumously in 1698 (Fryer 1698) records many details of the then India.
 - 2 For more details, see 'Madras Fabric' by me in the Madras Musings, 2014 (<https://archive.madrasmusings.com/ol%2024%20No%209/madras-fabric.html>, accessed 20 December 2025).
 - 3 Nice: Borrowed into English from the Old French (13th-14th centuries), which meant 'foolish', 'ignorant', 'senseless'; came to mean 'kind' through 'timid', 'fastidious', 'dainty' in the 18th century; presently has come to mean 'pleasant' in the 20th century. Grit: 'Sand', 'dust', 'gravel' in old English. Evolved to mean 'determination', 'courage' in the 19th century America. Fake: Emerged from fegen of the 18th-century German or, probably Dutch. In the 18th-century London 'fake' was a criminal slang. It meant counterfeit items and practices before entering common usage. A popular suggestion links it to the practice of 'feagueing', making a horse appear more lively than usual. Okay: An American invention that originated as an intentional, humorous misspelling and abbreviation of 'all correct' of oll Korrekt (originally German); first used in America as 'o.k.', later transformed as 'ok' and much later as an accepted verb spelt 'okay' deriving into 'okaying', 'okayed'.

syntax (Rickford 1986; IDEA [International Dialects of English Archives], <https://www.dialectsarchive.com/> accessed on 24 December 2025). Colloquialism was an ethnic marker among the British community of 19th-century India, as evidenced by words listed in Hobson–Jobson.

Assimilated words into British usage include influences from different Indian languages that are mostly contact-induced borrowing. The partial congruence of the assimilated Indian words as British colloquialisms with standard British English can be perceived as unmistakable evidence of linguistic novelty. Additionally, the listed words in Hobson–Jobson fall under a novel, eclectic genre (pronounced *zhaan-ruh*, and not *jan-er* – most commonly said in India), since they include loanwords from spoken segments of different Indian languages. By adopting a ‘new’ form of spoken and written language, the British living in India (the Anglo-Indians) distinguished themselves from other speakers of formal English. This matches well with the pattern of evolution of the Chicano English, an American-English dialect spoken by Mexican Americans in the Southwest, characterized by Spanish-influenced pronunciation (e.g., sound of ‘th’ said as the sound of ‘d’), unique vocabulary (e.g., ‘barely’ meaning ‘just now’), and specific grammatical patterns, a fully formed native-English variety reflecting its cultural heritage (Penfield 1985).

Overall, the Hobson–Jobson is a fascinating book that lists several assimilated Indian words in English, sometimes modified slightly for an unyielding English tongue, but spelt using English letters of the alphabet in 19th-century India. The Hobson–Jobson not only provides a comprehensive list of such assimilated words but also speaks elaborately of their evolution and change over time, drawing evidence from various previously published documents. Additionally, the Hobson–Jobson is a repository of Indian history, approached and documented uniquely via assimilated Indian words.

A comprehensive knowledge of historical lexicons, dictionaries, and glossaries in the English language is critical for present-day English teachers, essentially because such books provide scope for a systematic understanding of the evolution of the English language, meanings, and origins of words that will go a long way in improving teaching

practices, particularly in the TESOL context (Miller 2006).

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